

Massachusetts Pre-School and Kindergarten
Learning Standards in the Domains of Social-
Emotional Development and Approaches to
Play and Learning

Literature Review

Summary
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What Research Tells Us

1. **Social emotional competence contributes to school readiness and academic success.**
 - There are significant associations between social emotional development and academic learning.
 - Social and emotional competencies prepare children to meet the demands of the classroom, engage fully in learning, and benefit from instruction.
 - *Social and emotional well-being in early childhood predicts favorable social, behavioral, and academic adjustment into middle childhood and adolescence. It helps children navigate new environments, facilitates development of supportive relationships with peers and adults, and supports their ability to participate in learning activities.
 - Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker. Development of these skills can help prevent or reduce many different risky behaviors (e.g. drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out).
 - *Social and emotional learning helps children develop the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed to foster healthy relationships with peers, manage conflict with others, express care and concern, and work effectively with peers and teachers (e.g., empathy, respect, cooperation, managing emotions, critical thinking, self-control, goal setting, problem solving). The resulting competencies contribute to the overall well-being of children and youth, improved academic performance, healing and coping with chronic exposure to violence.
2. **Poor social emotional competence has detrimental effects:**
 - In the converse: *The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) explains that early emotional experiences are literally built in to the architecture of young children's brains. When feelings are not well managed, thinking can be impaired.
 - *Children with emotional or behavioral challenges are likely to receive less adult support for development and learning and to be more isolated from peers. Research shows that children with social/emotional difficulties are likely to lose out academically in many ways (e.g., lower academic achievement, greater likelihood of grade retention or dropping out of school) as well as greater risk of delinquency and of committing criminal juvenile offenses in adolescence
2. **Self-management skills are critical.** [Self-management, including the ability to focus attention, resist distractions, and regulate emotions, is a fundamental skill that undergirds all of academic learning.]
 - *Self-regulation* = conscious control of thoughts/actions including ability to understand and regulate emotions, cognitions, and behaviors; *social competence* = ability to demonstrate conscious control of thoughts and actions in social interactions.*
 - Well-developed *executive function skills* (e.g., planning, focusing attention, managing emotions, and behavior) improve outcomes across many areas of development and learning.*
 - Significant long-term benefits: A recent study on the long-term benefits of self-control tracked people from childhood to age 32, and found that self-control pays off in many ways on a long-term basis. Children who were found to have greater self-control as children continued to have self-control in major life functions in adulthood, were healthier and wealthier in their 30s, regardless of their families' background.*
4. **Children develop and learn in the context of relationships with peers or significant adults.** When a child can understand self and others, take in social information accurately to make good decisions, interact successfully, and regulate behavior, many classroom learning tasks are made easier.
 - *Social relationships:* A child who has friends and a well-running social world also has more personal resources to focus on learning. Children who exhibit positive social dispositions may learn more (and may like learning more) when interacting with peers. They have been found to demonstrate greater attention, persistence, and more positive attitudes toward learning. Positive engagement with peers can extend children's attention, support encoding and retrieval of information, and support outcomes such as early reading and mathematics.*
 - Children's care [and learning] environments, specifically their interactions with mothers and care providers [teachers] contribute to children's social and emotional development.

5. The Frameworks Institute (2009) views child development as a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society. They contend that “Brain plasticity and the ability to change behavior decrease over time, and getting it right early is less costly, to society and individuals, than trying to fix it later (Pay Now or Pay Later).”*
- Education programs that incorporate social emotional learning can play a crucial role in developing protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of exposure to conflict. This is achieved through building intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that are necessary for managing emotions and building healthy relationships. Social and emotional learning strengthens the healing and coping mechanisms needed to deal with adversity, violence and suffering, essential for healthy development.*
 - *Students who participate in school-based programs focused on social and emotional learning benefit in many ways. Positive results did not come at the expense of performance in core academic skills, but rather enhanced academic achievement, and follow up data supported that these results were maintained. Students improved significantly with regard to:
 - Social and emotional skills
 - Attitudes about themselves, others, and school
 - Social and classroom behavior
 - Conduct problems such as classroom misbehavior and aggression
 - Emotional distress such as stress and depression
 - Achievement test scores and school grades, including an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement

*See literature review for citations to original sources of data.

The key details of the research on social and emotional development and approaches to play and learning will be enlightening to teachers and providers of early education and care. As part of this state initiative, we have created a Review of the Literature and posted it on a website accessible to all who are interested. We invite and encourage you to read and learn about the importance of social and emotional learning and strategies for supporting it in schools and programs.

Please visit:

<http://learningstandards.wikispaces.com/Focus+Group>